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ABSTRACT

This paper, a portion of a workshop presentation concerning language curriculum for the non-major, explores some of the reasons for the sad situation in which language programs find themselves today and makes some suggestions for some of the things which we need to do in order to make ourselves more attractive to the students, particularly to the non-major. The possibilities suggested include the following: (1) more flexible scheduling, (2) multiple tracks, (3) more emphasis on communication, (4) more attention to understanding the language, (5) more effective use of the media, (6) more relevant and contemporary course content, (7) more courses on civilization and culture, (8) content courses in the language, (9) interdepartmental and interdisciplinary courses, (10) the use of the foreign language department as a resource for other departments and the community, (11) courses in English, (12) awareness of the careers in which knowledge of an FL is an asset, (13) advocacy of double majors, and (14) maximum use of overseas programs for all career areas. Actually, it turns out that simply doing some of the things which are most necessary to make our own major programs viable will at the same time make them more attractive to other students. (Author/KM)

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LANGUAGE CURRICULUM FOR THE NON-MAJOR
Northeast Conference April 11 & 12, 1975
Robert L. Baker

A first question which each of us must explore for himself is the reasons for our sudden condern with the non-major. Are we acting out of conviction, based on a long and thorough consideration of a philosophy of education and of the place of languages in that education?

Or are we acting out of panic? With language requirements gone or going we realize the extent to which many of our students have been in our classes under protest. With our jobs on the line we suddenly realize the need to prove our worth, to broaden our appeal. Protected by language requirements and lulled by government and foundation money we became too ingrown to see even our own students and their needs and interests. If we are reacting in such a last-ditch effort to save our enrolments, we are doomed to failure, for our ultimate concern is still not the students, but ourselves, and we are unlikely to prove any more farsighted than we have been in the past.

Why are we in trouble?
(1) We have not been relevant enough. Particularly today, what could be more relevant than being able to communicate with other people? Somehow we have not been able to convince enough students that language and literature are the most humanizing of subjects when properly taught and therefore among the most relevant, whether from the point of view of personality development or from the point of view of job preparation for positions involving contact with and close dealings with other people (whether or not the specific foreign language one may have studied plays any role in the job in question.) Even if we do not modify our philosophy too much, we can give something which can be gotten in no other way, if the courses are well taught as humanities in the truest sense.

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(2) We have been too inflexible in our format and demands, not willing to take into account individual interests and individual differences in the most effective learning modalities. (And then we complain that our students aren't motivated!) We have insisted on lock-step pacing. Of course correcting this situation will require a great deal of work on the part of teachers at the college level - but too much work for a while is better than no work at all. Make no mistake - the writing is of the wall - diversify or die. Among other things this means that the teacher will have to show a willingness (far too rare at the college level) to develop himself, to learn something new himself (and if the students can observe some of this process, all the better!)

(3) We have been too major and graduate-school oriented, interested only in turning out replicas of ourselves for a society which wants no more of us. We will be morally responsible if we do not begin to prepare our students better for the world as it is today and as it promises to be in the coming years. Here I want to stress the importance of counseling from the very first

contacts with our students. And I mean not just positive counseling, but negative counseling. It is wrong to allow a large number of students to enter a traditional literature major under the impression that they are going to be able to apply their major directly in the job market.

(4) We have been too much literature and past-oriented. Students today are interested in culture in a broader sense, and particularly in contemporary culture. This is not to say that a well-taught literature course, even when reading ancient literature, cannot be relevant - but we have very seldom proved this to our students.

Actually, much of what we need to do for the non-major can be accomplished at the same time as we undertake what is an obvious necessity and perhaps of greater urgency - the overhauling of the program for majors. If we will make the major program more original, viable, flexible and exciting we will at the same time satisfy much of the interest of the non-major and we will also attract increasing numbers of majors!

In any event, we must all face the very real situation today- languages are in themselves no longer a career preparation except for a very few students who can and should go into teaching - and even for them language is no longer enough. Language today plays a supportive role - one needs to have real competence in some other field, then language becomes a valuable tool and a real career enhancement. (This is true even in translating, since almost all translating will be in technical areas - few people can make a living at literary translation, and then only after having established a reputation.) The area of translating and interpreting is one of the areas in which students must be particularly carefully counseled, in order to remove a lot of false impressions which they have. (Proficiency in English?!)

What are some of the things we can and should be investigating (many are as relevant for the major as for the non-major)?

(1) More flexible scheduling of courses, techniques for individualizing instruction.

(2) Multiple tracks for students of different backgrounds and/or interest (the spoken language, reading, literature, contemporary culture, etc).

(3) More emphasis on language for communication (of what the students want to say, among other things).

(4) In many situations we should pay more attention to understanding the spoken and written language and less stress on active skills.

(5) We need to investigate ways to use the media more effectively, both to make our classes livelier and to present contemporary culture.

(6) We need to examine the content of our courses, and in most cases make it more contemporary and more relevant, whether it be a course on literature or on culture.

(7) We need, in most cases, to provide more courses on civilization and culture.

(8) We need to explore the possibility of offering content courses (History, Economics, etc.) in the foreign language.

(9) We need to encourage interdepartmental and interdisciplinary courses.

(10) We need to humble ourselves a little and find out in what way we can be a resource department for other departments.

(11) We need to consider community-outreach possibilities - how can we serve the broader community?

(12) We should consider the possibility of courses in English with either literary or culture content.

(13) We need to consider the wide range of career areas in which a knowledge of FL is an asset, including: Translation, accounting, business administration, secretarial science, library work, government work, journalism and the media, architects, social service (policemen, social workers, hotel and restaurant employees).

(14) We must counsel our students to take double majors or joint majors.

(15) We must maximize the opportunities provided by overseas programs. They must cease to be thought of as a junior year abroad for language and literature majors, but as a manner of improving language skills for all career areas and for giving intimate contact with the foreign culture to workers in all career areas.

I realize that much of what I have said is distasteful, particularly to those who teach, as do I, in a small liberal arts college. We feel we are selling out our principles, that we are degrading a liberal arts education by making it practical.